

SOMETHING TO CHEW ON

Multitudes of human beings are living in a state of soul deprivation because they, like cattle in a drought, are feeding only on straw which contains no real nourishment. It is a delusion to think one can live on straw; yet people attempt it. The prodigal son tried it. He asked for all his goods, left home, and after a while tried to live on what swine eat. He would have starved to death had he not come to his senses with the recognition that the soul cannot find nourishment in the husks fed to swine.

The thirst for superficial thrills is straw. Hungry people chase after coloured bubbles, but when these burst, nothing is left. Their chase is simply a vain attempt to find some satisfaction, something to subdue their awful hunger pangs. Pleasure is at best a spurious substitute for genuine joy. The next morning brings another day of starvation. Nevertheless, people seek external excitation of their senses, and when one stimulant loses its power they look for another. Never satisfied, they slowly die from starvation. These are "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God." An external world of pleasure can never fill the need for inner joy - the bottomless joy of the inner spirit. Headpieces filled with the straw of sensuous pleasure make only for hollow men.

Instead of great thoughts, men fill their minds with the straw of superficial words and symbols and the chaff of trivial ideas. Present literature is filled with such straw. Newsstands, with volumes of paper-backed mediocre books, sensuous stories, and wild tales having no possible connection with reality, are selling straw. Magazine racks are filled with licentious, literature, not fit for the human mind, which was created to project great thoughts. Man can never rise above the thoughts on which he feeds. Headpieces filled with the straw of pigmy thoughts make only for hollow men.

The tendency is for some to stuff their stomachs in order to cover the emptiness of their souls. They are like the prosperous landowner in Christ's parable who said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns, and build larger ones; and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; take your ease, eat, drink, be merry.' But God stepped in and said, "Fool! This night your soul is required of you; and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" Jesus added, "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God."

In this parable God is not chiding man or upbraiding him for tending to his own and his family's physical needs. The Lord expects man to care for these. We are told that "if anyone does not provide for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." The lesson does not speak against providing for physical needs. The point of Jesus' message is that he is a fool who lays up only treasure for himself and is not spiritually rich. No man is a fool for providing for temporal needs, as is sometimes supposed, but he is a fool when he becomes impoverished in spiritual matters.

The problem is one of confusing the means with the end. To make provision for payment of your grocery bill is not a sin. But Jesus taught a valuable lesson when he said, "Man

shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." Matthew 4:4. At the same time, it is understood that without bread, man cannot live at all.

The important lesson is to place values in their correct scale. God is not starting an argument with us about our needs. He tells us, "For all the nations of the world seek these things; and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek His kingdom, and these things shall be yours as well." God takes no pleasure in watching a family without enough money to buy food or clothing. On the other hand, never think that we should fill our houses and our stomachs while neglecting our souls.

The woman at the well understood this lesson. In speaking with her concerning spiritual wealth, Jesus pointed to the well by which they stood and said, "Everyone who drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." How wise the woman was when she simply answered, "Give me this water, that I may not thirst." John 4:13-15.

In order to be enriched, man must be filled with God and not with straw. Life never grows stale as long as God is the centre. We may eat breakfast, lunch, and tea, yet we will hunger again; but the living water of Christ gives unending nourishment. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." Matthew 5:6.

A.J. Cronin, the physician, was successful beyond the ordinary. He was wealthy, respected, healthy, and very wise in his own eyes and in the eyes of others. Yet there came a day when he felt a need. Of his situation he wrote in this vein: "If my conscience troubled me, I buried it beneath a mass of worldly interests. While I never openly disowned Christianity - I was too much of a coward to do so - I conveniently forgot about it. I had reached the supreme goal of egotistic existence. With such a history, at this late stage of self-deception and self-indulgence, it might seem inconceivable that I should have sought peace of mind and soul in returning to my childhood faith ... Yet it was not strange to me, for in truth, however much I beat against them its bars had always enclosed me, and intermittently in my heart, sounding quiet through the tumult of the world, I had heard the echo of that voice which would not be denied. And even while I fled Him, down the nights and down the days, ... and under running laughter, I could still hear the beat of those pursuing feet, that secret whisper, 'Rise, clasp My hand, and come.'

"It was not an easy step to take, and one bitter to self-love. For years I had gone on in pride and self-complacency. But that growing interior desolation was irresistible in its compulsion. I stumbled forward, my last defences beaten down, and yielded to the craving in my soul. And by whatever means it was accomplished, my period of rebellion against Heaven at last was ended ... I had made the immense discovery of why I was alive."

Before, - egotistic living; after, - the wealth of spiritual riches.

Someone on a recent vacation in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, the Venice of America, while gliding down a canal, passed some particularly resplendent homes. The guide said, as they passed one of the most luxurious mansions, "Mr. -- of Chicago lives here - that is, for a few weeks each year. He is the president of this company and chairman of that board. He has a swimming pool in the centre of a beautiful patio. He has a yacht in the back yard, a Cadillac in the front, and - ulcers in his stomach."

William Saroyan, in his play "The Time of Your Life," describes a discouraged policeman talking to Joe: "I think we are all crazy," he cries. "Here we are in this wonderful world, full of all the wonderful things - here we are - all of us. Look at us. Just look at us. We're nuts. We've got everything, but we always feel lousy and dissatisfied just the same."

The prophet Micah said it this way: "Thou shalt eat, but not be satisfied." Micah 6:14. The trouble is not that we have too many things, or too much beauty and comfort; the trouble comes when we do not make God first. God wishes us to enjoy and share His gifts. He gives them; but He does not want these to be the heart of our living or the goal of our doing. They are a means, never an end.

It is truly foolish to fill one's headpiece with the straw of egotistic, selfish living, without sharing God's good gifts. What a heartbreak! What disappointment and delusion! Notice the contrast of a headpiece filled with straw and a heart centred in God. The one finds expression in these words by Anatole France: "Life is the result of a disease in the constitution of the planet, a morbid growth, a leprosy, something loathsome, something, in fact, which would never be found in a well-constituted, healthy star."

The other is summed up by Robert Browning's "Saul":

How good is man's life, the mere living! How fit to employ all the heart and the soul and the senses for ever in joy!"

We have so much for which to be joyous. Each moment of life is an ecstatic experience when our soul is nourished with something besides straw. Endless resources - spiritual riches - are within reaching distance. May we seize them so as to not wallow in spritual poverty - we may be poor in the material goods of this world; but if we have Christ, we have riches beyond comprehension!